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Backings and Toppings

Backing is used to give the garment stability as you are applying your embroidery. Backing is also known as stabilizer. Using the proper backing prevents puckering around the embroidery. Most fabrics will stretch as they are being hooped and it is very important to avoid stretching them even a small amount. If it is stretched while you are hooping it, it will create puckers around the finished embroidery. Using the correct backing for the garment is extremely important for high quality finished products. For most applications it is advisable to use 2 layers of backing for true stability. A medium weight backing will work for most applications.

DO NOT USE SCRAPS of backing across the center of your hoop to save money. This is a very huge mistake and I have gone into shops and found so many embroiderers doing this, to save money. They think that it is not necessary to use it any place other than where the embroidery is going. The backing **MUST** cover the entire hoop. If it does not, your fabric will pull in as it is being embroidered and you will not get good registration especially if you are doing a multi-color design. This applies to all fabrics.

Some people are under the impression that you do not need a backing if your garment is heavy such as a bag or a jacket back. This is not true. All embroideries need a backing for stability. Often if I have a garment such as a bag that is hard to hoop with backing, I will hoop it without the backing and slide a piece under the hoop when I put it into the machine. This applies only to very rigid fabrics. This will give it the stability and crispness needed for the finished product. It also gives you a piece of backing to rip against instead of your garment if you happen to make a mistake. For this type of application, one layer of backing is sufficient.

There are basically two categories of backings but within these two categories there are different types that you need to carry in your inventory to be used on a daily basis depending on what type of garment you are going to be applying your embroidery.

Tear-away Backing

Tear-away backing is used on all woven fabrics such as denim, chambray, twill, cotton oxford dress shirts, nylon oxford, canvas, bags, aprons, flags, sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, napkins and etc. It is also used on towels and washcloths. I have found that a 1.5 oz weight has worked best for almost all of my applications using the tear-away backing. I normally use two layers for most applications; sometimes I use only one and occasionally I will use three. I only hoop two layers into the hoop when I am hooping the garment, but I will place another layer under the garment after I put it into the machine. This will give extra crispness to small lettering. It actually makes the columns in the lettering wider.

Cap backing is a 3 oz. heavy tear away backing that is used on caps, front, sides and back. I have found that one layer of backing will work great for most caps, but sometimes if you have an unstructured cap 2 layers will produce a sharper more crisp look than using one layer. I will hoop one layer into the cap when I am putting the cap onto the cap frame, and then lay the extra layer into the cap as I am attaching the cap frame to the cap driver on the machine. It really does not take that much extra time and I notice a huge difference. The lettering will be much flatter and does not pull in nearly as much. When hooping a cap back, I use a flat or tubular hoop and I do not hoop the backing in. I hoop the cap back, attach the tubular frame to the machine and then slide in a piece of the cap backing under the hoop. It really is too hard to keep the cap back straight when you are hooping it with the backing. I have also used cap backing at times as an extra layer on extra heavy terry towels. It really helps to flatten out the columns in the monograms. It will soften up after it is washed.

Pressure Sensitive backing is a tear-away backing with a paper covering the sticky backing. You will peel away the paper and press the fabric onto the backing with items that are impossible or hard to hoop. This works especially well if you are using a clamping system or a one-piece hooping system. I show you how to use it in the video, **How To Hoop The Sides Of A Short Visor** in the cap section of Embroidery Applications on the website.

Cut-away Backing

Cut-away backing is primarily used on all knits with a few exceptions. For knits I mean, all polo, staff or golf shirts, t-shirts, sweaters, fleece and any other type of stretchy fabric. I have found that a 2 oz. works great and I use two layers for most of my applications. On some fabrics you can use one layer

of cut-away and one layer of tear-away, but you must experiment using the different combinations to see if this is working and you have the same quality and crispness that you have with two layers of cut-away.

No Show backing is a very light weight waffle weave cut-away backing that is used for all light weight and pastel colored knit fabrics. Sometimes it is called a Mesh backing. The No Show backing is so soft that it is advisable to use 1 layer of tear-away backing under it for extra stability especially if you have small letters in the logo. The tear-away will then be torn off and the No show will be cut away. You will not see a shadow of the backing from the front of the garment as you so often see when using the normal cut-away backing. This is extremely important when you are applying your embroidery to the very thin fabrics such as the pima cottons.

The No show backing also works great on the front of sweatshirts because it will let it fall in a natural manner instead of being stiff once the backing is removed. This type of fabric does not need the extra bulk of the two layers of normal cut away backing. Many people think because it is a sweatshirt, that you need to use heavy backing, untrue. It is stability you are looking for, not weight.

This combination works very well on the moisture wicking fabrics that are so popular today. This fabric is very stretching and soft and the 2 layers of no show backing along with the 1 layer of crisp tearaway backing is the perfect combination for this type of fabric.

It is really not necessary to carry a lot of different weights of backing. Try and keep your inventory down as much as possible. You may want to add a black backing to your inventory for light weight dark colors or dark colored jacket backs. This is less obvious to the finished garment.

Toppings: Toppings are used to keep the thread standing on top of the fabric instead of sinking into the fabric. This is especially important on most knits, fleece and towels. Some people feel that it is too expensive and a lot of trouble to remove so they will not use it. This is a mistake. The cost is pennies per garment and results are striking. Using a topping can set you apart from the crowd as an embroiderer. If done correctly, it is very easy to remove, takes seconds and gives you a much higher quality looking finished product.

There are basically two types of toppings. One is the water soluble and the other is removed with heat. I prefer the water soluble for most applications.

There are different weights on the market, but again, I prefer a light weight to a heavy weight. If I need more weight, I will add another layer instead of stocking more than one weight. There are several brands on the market and I prefer the Solvy brand, but that is a matter of opinion. I have found that it is the easiest to remove and some the heavier products are more difficult to remove. I like to keep everything that I do as simple as possible.

If you decide to use the topping that is removed with heat you must be very careful. Very often the heat used to melt away the topping will also melt or shrink up your fabric. It is not advisable to use this type of topping on synthetics.

Refer to the video **How to Remove Topping** in the **Embroidery Basics** section under **Garment Finishing**. Using this topping gives a great finish to your product and makes a great impression on your customer.

Using Topping as Backing

I do use a heavy weight topping for backing on some items that I do not want to see any backing on the finished garment such as a handkerchief, fleece headband, neck scarf, silk shantung, lace and a fleece blanket if the embroidery does not have large filled in areas.

Sometimes I use one layer and sometimes I need two layers. We will be using this heavier topping for backing in several videos.

Note: When you embroider dress shirts, it is advisable to use the water-soluble topping to protect your garment. This also applies to silks and satins. Even though these are woven fabrics, I use the water-soluble topping to protect the fabric from dirt and oils coming from the machine. For some reason, if I embroider on any of these types of fabrics, the machine will drop some oil. Oil and dirt will not go thru the water-soluble topping and you have totally protected your garment. That little extra insurance pays off in dividends!